

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE

A SKIN GAME

or Steve Manley among the Tanners
BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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A SKIN GAME; OR,

Steve Manley Among the Tanners.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A SKIN GAME.

"It's the truth, Steve!"

"You go chase yerself, Garrity! What do you think I am—a gold-brick Rube? Whoever heard of shoes worth fifty dollars a pair?"

"I have, Steve."

"You've been hitting the pipe. Don't give me any more of your dreams, or I'll think you take me for a hayseed."

"I'm giving it to you straight, Steven, nevertheless," replied Inspector Garrity, laughing at the expression of insuperable disdain and incredulity on Steve Manley's boyish face.

"And I'd be willing to bet, Steve, if the truth was known, that there are swell women right here in Pittsburg or in Allegheny, who have shoes that never cost

them a copper less than fifty dollars a pair."

"Mebbe they cost a hundred!" grinned Steve, perching himself on the arm of Chief O'Mara's vacant chair and doubtfully surveying the burly figure of the genial detective. "And mebbe, Garrity, you were the jay what give up yer hard-earned dough to make a hit with 'em by giving 'em shoes worth fifty plunkers per shoe. For I'm onto the fact, inspector, that you're a genooine Berry Wall, and you'd oughter stand ace high with the swell chips. But yer can't fool me with yer curves, Garrity, and I don't swaller the shoe story."

"Perhaps 'twould go down if I got you a dose of oil," laughed Garrity.

"But t'wouldn't stay without a chaser, inspector. I'd have ter t'row it up."

And Steve Manley dubiously shook his head, with unfeigned contempt for the story which the inspector had been telling him.

The two were in Chief O'Mara's office in the police headquarters, both waiting the arrival of the chief, and the inspector had taken this occasion to inform Steve of a very curious and startling fact, of which not one in a thousand people in the entire community ever even dreamed.

It was so very curious that Steve suspected that he was being imposed upon, a fact which led Inspector Garrity to persist in his attempt to convince him of the truth of the story.

"Then you don't believe it, Steve?" he inquired.

"Not so's you'd notice it, inspector."

"But I'm going to give you the facts, just the same."

"I'll be glad to get 'em!" laughed Steve. "What are the shoes made of? Gold leaf?"

"No, Steve; they are made of tanned skins."

"Of a canary bird, I s'pose."

"Not off of a bird at all."

"Where do they come from, then?"

"The shoes are made from skins taken from a human body," Garrity gravely explained.

"Come off your pedestal! D'ye think I'm going to swaller that?"

"It is true, Steve," persisted the inspector. "A tanned human skin, particularly that of a man, makes the finest kind of leather."

"Well, some of 'em oughter! They're tough enough."

"And out of these skins," continued Garrity, "are made the daintiest kind of ladies' low ties, for house parties and dancing."

"Yer don't say!"

"Oh, you needn't look so incredulous, for I am giving it to you dead straight."

"Is it a regular biz," demanded Steve, with a grin; "or only a skin game?"

"It is decidedly a skin game," said Inspector Garrity, laughing.

"I'd say it was. Who makes the shoes?"

"They are secretly made and secretly sold," replied the inspector. "It is not a new industry, by any means. If you'll read 'Carlyle's French Revolution,' you will find that it secretly flourished in France as long ago as that period. And if you'll read the documentary reports of the Massachusetts Legislature back in 1883, you will find plenty of evidence of the fact—"

"Say, Garrity, come down off of that dictionary! D'ye think you're talking to a college guy as sleeps with a cycloegia? If you're going to string me with a yarn like this, come down where a kid can get onto it. I'm not taking the job ter figger out what those jawbreakers mean, not this morning."

"Well, Steve, you'll find that back in the early eighties human skins were being tanned in the State of Massachusetts, some of which were probably sold for the very purpose I have described."

"Where did they swipe the skins?"

"They came from the dead bodies of paupers, chiefly."

"Paupers, eh?"

"Precisely," nodded the inspector. "You know, or you should, that many of the bodies of those persons who die in the almshouses, or on the poor farms, are sold at various prices to the medical colleges, or to private students, for the purpose of dissection. That is how anatomy is studied."

"And they sell the stiffs fur so much a head, do they?"

"Certainly."

"And does the sawbones sell the skin ter the tanner?"

"Some of the less scrupulous ones are known to have done so. That is a way by which they get even after paying for

the body. A tanned skin is worth a good deal more than the whole body."

"What does the tanner do with the skin, Garrity?"

"He tans it, of course. He has to do this work secretly, and generally is in league with some shoemaker, who buys the skins of him and turns them into the shoes I have described."

"And the shoemaker?"

"He in turn is in league with some other party, usually some shrewd and clever fellow, who undertakes to sell the shoes on the sly."

"Well, that is a skin game for a fact!" cried Steve, who now began to believe there really was something in the story. "And do they get fifty plunks for the shoes, as you said?"

"Never less than that, Steve. It's an illegal business, you know, and those concerned in any part of it take mighty long chances of doing time."

"D'yem mean ter tell me, Garrity," cried Steve, jumping down from his perch, "that the swell women will wear shoes made out of a dead man's skin?"

"Half of them don't know what they are made of," Garrity bluntly rejoined. "They know only that they got a finer shoe than they can buy in any store in the country."

"Is that so for a fact?"

"Indeed, yes; I am giving it to you on the dead level. The shoes are remarkable both in style and texture, and there's many a vain woman who would buy the same shoe even if she knew of what it was made. You don't know much about the eagerness with which jealous society women vie with each other in the matter of dress. Why, there are women right here in the city who would give up fifty dollars for a pair of those shoes as readily as you'd let go a nickle for a sandwich."

"Why don't the force get onto 'em an' call 'em down?"

"That's easier said than done," laughed

Garrity. "It's not always wise to bark up against a barrel of money. Furthermore, the whole business is so cautiously and secretly done, and by so many hands, that it's not easy to run them all down."

"But the fly woman must know who she gets the shoes of," argued Steve, with much interest.

"She don't know him by name; and, if she did, she would not disclose it."

"What's the reason?"

"Because when she buys the shoes, she knows she's taking a chance. The peddler may tell her that they are smuggled goods, and warn her against knowing anything about them, other than that she bought them of a traveling salesman who was a total stranger. Or he may tell her the truth, and then she surely would keep her mouth shut. All the woman really wants, Steve, is the shoes; and after she once has seen and worn a pair, she is always so pleased that she don't care a rap about the facts concerning them. The peddler, also, is invariably a shrewd duck, and he knows by experience just what style of woman to tackle, and that after he once has got her she will prove to be a good customer and one who will be discreet."

Steve still looked a little doubtful about the existence of any such heinous outrage of general public sentiment, and Garrity, laughing at the look on his round, boyish face, repeated one of his previous remarks.

"I'd bet, Steve, that there are women right here in Pittsburg or Allegheny who have one or more pairs of these same shoes."

"That may be too true for a joke, Detective Garrity," said the deep voice of Chief O'Mara, who at that moment entered the office. "Good-morning, Steve."

"Good-morning, chief," bowed Steve, hurriedly pulling off his cap.

"I happened to overhear part of what was said before I entered," continued

Chief O'Mara, as he threw off his coat and took the seat at his desk. "And it's not the first time I have heard it, either."

"Then he wasn't stringing me, sir?" inquired Steve, with some eagerness.

"Far from it!" was the rather grim rejoinder. "It lately has been given to me, through the vaguest kind of hints, that some of this business has been going on right under our noses. If it is true, I'd give something to know it, and more to land the rascals one and all in the prisoners' dock."

"Can't it be done?" demanded Garrity.

"It can be done if we can locate the scoundrels, or learn anything definite about them," replied Chief O'Mara. "But their operations are carried on very much in the dark, and the parties who hinted the circumstances to me claim to know absolutely nothing about the actual facts."

"If shoes made of tanned human skins are being sold in Pittsburg, we ought to be able to get some trace of the peddlers, Chief O'Mara," observed Detective Garrity.

"I don't know that they are being sold here; I only suspect that they may be worn here. But I have no clew as to who may possess them."

"Mebbe I could get on to it, Chief O'Mara," suggested Steve.

"You have my permission to try," laughed the chief.

"That's all any man ought to want!" cried Steve. "And I'm blowed if I don't give the blooming game a hunt."

"You must be careful, however."

"Or you'll be losing your own skin in the attempt," added Garrity, laughing.

"Don't youse lose any sleep over that, inspector," retorted the young detective, with a scornful shrug and glance at the burly detective. "I ain't so big as youse, but I'll gamble none o' yer lady friends ever has the privilege of walking round in my skin. I can take care of Steve Manley, all right, all right."

"I don't mean that at all!" Chi
O'Mara curtly interposed. "I mean th
you must be careful and not stir up an
dirty water in quarters from which, if w
ultimately could prove nothing, seriou
remonstrances might come."

"Oh, I'm onto all that, Chief O'Mara!"
exclaimed Steve, with a quick appreciatio
of his meaning. "There ain't no gill
can pump me fur what I know, and don'
you forget it. I'm over seven, sir."

"Here! Where are you going!" cried
Chief O'Mara, when Steve suddenly
whirled about and started for the outer
office.

"Just ter see what night that swell bal
comes off over in Allegheny, sir," said
Steve, turning back. "There might be a
chance ter get me lamps on a pair of them
shoes over there, sir, if I could find a way
ter get in. And it'll be a yaller day if I
can't!"

Chief O'Mara glanced at Garrity, and
both burst out laughing.

There was something quite ludicrous in
the readiness with which this youngster
had hit upon a way to take a first step in
the investigation of such a curious and
complicated a case as this might prove
to be.

But Steve Manley already had demon-
strated to the entire satisfaction of both
that, back of the boyish abandonment and
that free and easy familiarity which, in
one less capable, would have been speed-
ily checked, there existed a grave and
loyal heart, a sagacity and discretion rare
in one of his years, and a shrewdness and
discernment born of early contact with the
world, and sharpened by conflict with its
hardships. Trust a boy of the streets to
know the world pretty nearly for what
it is.

As a result of the further conference
upon the lad's impulsive suggestion,
Steve was, indeed, at the grand reception
and ball tendered to the Governor and
staff on the following night, an event

which will readily be recalled by local readers, and in which the ultra-élite, both of Pittsburg and Allegheny were represented.

Although Steve's occupation there was an humble one, it was of his own shrewd selection and well calculated to suit his designs. Merely a word from Chief O'Mara to the directors of the affair had paved the way for Steve, and enabled him to get to work upon what proved to be one of the most startling and stirring cases in the criminal records of that community.

CHAPTER II.

STEVE STRIKES A CLUE.

"Here, kid, give me a shine, and look sharp! I'm down for the next waltz, and late in arriving."

"If 'tain't done in time, sir, I'll have 'em hold der music. How'll that hit yer? Oh, I can do it for yer, dead easy!"

And Steve Manley looked brightly up and joined in the laugh of the man who had mounted to a seat in his chair.

The scene was a small side room adjoining the great ball-room. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The great reception was ended. The ball was at its height, however, and the floor and corridors and galleries were thronged with a brilliant gathering of wealthy and fashionable people for miles around. And some were there who were not so fashionable and not so wealthy.

From where the man sat the strains of the orchestral music could be plainly heard, and the maze of whirling couples gracing the floor could easily be seen.

He sat in the elevated chair of the youngster to whom had been accorded the bootblack's privilege of that evening.

And this youngster was Steve Manley, the clever boy detective, though very few would have recognized him then and there.

In the pursuit of his vocation, and in the hope of running upon some clue to the skin game discussed the previous morning, there was no employment too humble to have daunted Steve or to have been deemed unworthy his ambition.

The stranger had taken the chair and asked for a shine. He was a tall, smooth-faced fellow of twenty-five, with an aristocratic cast of features and a very professional air. He was a medical man, with a sub-instructor's position in one of the near medical colleges, and a house on Herron Hill for private students in preparatory courses.

His name was Gray, and he was called Dr. Gray.

There was a group of men outside the door which led into the ball-room, but the anteroom itself was occupied only by Steve Manley and this man Gray.

"So you think you could hold the waltz for me, do you?" laughed the latter, as Steve flourished his brushes with the dexterity of a genuine professor of shines and set to work.

"Do I think so?" cried Steve, in scornful accents. "What d'ye s'pose I'm here for? Ter see me patrons get der worst of it? Get wise, ole man; I guess not."

"You must have a pull here," laughed Gray.

"A pull? I've got more'n a pull! Der leader of der windjammers is a personal friend of mine. Dey wouldn't a played here only for me axin' 'em to."

"That was very kind of you. I suppose you've shaken hands with the Governor?"

"Naw, not ter-night; I was too busy."

"Too busy, eh?"

"Besides, he's on the odder side of der fence from me."

"Not alike in politics?"

"Naw! I'm agin der trusts. I'm sour on 'em."

"How's that?"

"Dey didn't use me on the square. Dey gimme der stiff paw. I was told I'd get a

fat billet with der leather trust if I'd carry der Ninth Ward, an' after I'd done it, Mark Hanna t'rowed me down. That's why I'm jugglin' der bristles. Change cars!"

Dr. Gray shifted his feet as requested; but, before he could respond to Steve's characteristic banter there hurriedly entered the room a short, middle-aged man of pronounced Hebraic countenance, and who evidently was much elated by discovering the young physician.

"You vos der very man I vos looking for, dogdor!" he cried, with a shrug of his shoulders and much rubbing of his large hands. "I vos up to your house by der hill, and vos told I'd find you here. So I giff up two good American dollars to ged in here. I could cry for my good money!"

A slight frown settled about the young doctor's cold eyes, and the light in them was not pleasant to look upon.

"You don't separate from your money very pleasantly at any time, Meckleburg," he rejoined. "I've just returned from Cleveland."

"So I vos tolts," nodded the Jew. "I have been to der house dwice this week, and could not find you. I've been wanting to see you."

"What's the trouble?" demanded Gray, lowering his voice.

"Der don't be any drouble, dogdor," answered the Jew; "only I must have two bundles of rags by der last of this week at der latest."

"Two!" exclaimed the doctor, half-inquiringly.

"Not less'n two, and more if you can ged 'em. Der peesness is so good der demand vos greater dan der supply."

"I'm not sure I can get two on such short notice," growled Gray, with a look of misgiving rising to his eyes.

"But it's tree whole days!" exclaimed Meckleburg, throwing up his hands. "And we haven't had one for most two

veeks, now. They ought to have two by this time, vat ain't too old to——"

"Shut up!" muttered Gray, glancing doubtfully down at the top of Steve's head.

But Steve appeared to be very busy putting the final touches upon the last shoe of the speaker, and without eyes or ears for what was occurring. Both were open, nevertheless, and he was keeping up a lively thinking. He wondered if they were talking about bodies, from which the skins were to be removed; or if they were really talking of—rags!

"Vat do you say, dogdor?" persisted Meckleburg. "I have to rebort to der yards by Friday."

"I cannot give you an answer here and now," replied Gray, quite curtly. "I've been away. I shall have to look the matter up in the morning."

"Couldn't you send word some dime before noon?"

"I will try to do so, yes."

"That will be better than nodding. But dry to ged 'em by Saturday, von't you, dogdor? You know der rags has to be——"

"Silence!" Gray again interrupted, as he sprang down from the chair. "Here's your pay, kid; keep the change. Come out this way, Meckleburg. You shouldn't have ventured here to see me, nor to ask about those infernal——"

But the rest was lost to Steve's listening ears; for Gray, frowning darkly, had quickly led his companion out of the room.

"I'm blowed if these guys look like ragmen," said Steve to himself, gazing after them, as they made their way along one side of the crowded ball-room.

"And if the rags didn't mean rags, they must have meant something the duffers were afraid to speak about. Report to the yards, eh? Mebbe that was a tan-yard. And he said the business was so good that they must have two more by

the last of the week. I wonder what them was. Mebbe two more stiffs, or two more skins? The sawbones cut him off like he was going to split the whole business. I think I'll hav ter look after der doctor for fear he gets led astray. Hully gee! if I can find out where he hangs out——"

But Steve's suspicious cogitations were at this point interrupted by the hurried approach of two ladies, one of whom quickly addressed him, and drew him back into the room, to the door of which his interest in the departing men had led him.

"I want to see if you can cleaunce one of my shoes, my boy," she explained. "An awkward waiter dropped a dish of salad, and I'm afraid the tie is entirely ruined. Dear me! Must I mount way up in that chair?"

"Sure, ma'am! Do yer think I can stand on me head and do a good job?"

"You can step up there, Myrtle," said her companion. "Here, take hold of my hand."

Steve took the measure of the two ladies at a glance.

Both were superbly dressed and noticeably handsome, and evidently were young married women of birth, wealth and culture.

"Will you close the door, Emily, please," the elder cried, immediately upon gaining the high chair. "I don't want to be seen from the ball-room. 'Twas awfully good of you to come in here with me. I was afraid we might encounter a number of men."

"I wonder does she take me for a monkey," thought Steve, seating himself at her feet.

"Thanks, Emily, dear," and the other smiled when the latter rejoined her after closing the door of the room. "Now wait a bit, boy! Don't perch my feet away up on those things. Only one shoe is damaged."

"Then you'll have to take a reef in the

lingerie, ma'am," said Steve. "It shades the light."

"I know; but I want to tell you what I wish. Don't be in such a rush."

"Didn't know but that you was down for the next dance, ma'am."

"Well, I'm not; and if I was, it would make no difference. Curious, isn't it, Mrs. Markham, that boys are all alike."

"It is in them, and must come out, Mrs. Bradley."

"Haven't you some powdered chalk or magnesia, my boy?" asked Mrs. Bradley, now drawing aside her lace skirts and raising to the iron foot-rest one of her shapely feet. "You see the shoe is stained and damp, and I wish you to dry it out a little, if you can, and then whiten the stain. I'm afraid the tie is ruined, and it's a shame!"

"Sure thing, ma'am, I've some chalk, but I'll use der rags first," said Steve, surveying with wide and startled eyes the dainty tie."

For its perfect style, the gloss of the leather, and its firm yet pliable texture, were wonderfully different from those of any shoe he ever had seen upon a lady's foot, or in a store window. The moment he set eyes on it, Steve shrewdly suspected that he had struck one of the suspected shoes made from a tanned human skin.

When it caught the eye of the lady's companion, moreover, it had a similar effect upon her; and as Steve bent over to get to work, she rejoined to the other, in sympathetic tones:

"A shame, indeed! The waiter is very culpable. They are awfully dainty ties."

"They ought to be!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley. "They cost enough."

"Der leather's out o' sight, ma'am. 'Tain't made by the trusts, I'd gamble on that."

"Can you repair the damage, my boy?" she asked, smiling down at him, and little dreaming that the "boy" was more cunning than many a man.

"Gimme der time, ma'am, and I'll make it as good as new. Der stain is only 'cause der shoe is wet. It's come out already."

"You shall have all the time you want."

"I'll not want much, if you two'll only get a talking," thought Steve.

"Of whom do you buy such ties, Myrtle?" asked the other. "I never saw any like them in the stores here. Did you get them in New York?"

Mrs. Bradley shrugged her shapely shoulders, blushed a little, and then laughed. Very evidently she thought Steve too much of a boy to be of consequence, for she quite ignored him when she rejoined:

"No, Emily, dear, I bought them of a man who called at my house."

"A peddler?"

"Well, not exactly. He is an agent for them. They are a special kind of which he claims to have control. He was recommended to me by wealthy Mrs. Arkwright, of Philadelphia, who is a dear, personal friend. They are——"

She paused for an instant, and again glanced down at Steve; but Steve was never so busy in all his life as he was at that moment, and she indifferently added:

"They are imported, Emily, and I'm inclined to think that there may be an evasion of duty on them, or something of that sort, for the gentleman who calls to sell them is very circumspect."

"I wonder does that mean he's a dago," thought Steve.

"What is his name, Myrtle?"

"I don't know even that. He calls about once a year, and I nearly always patronize him; but he never yet condescended to give me one of his cards."

"I'd like to get such a pair of ties. Can't you contrive to put me in touch with the man?"

"Easily, my dear. I bought this pair of him only yesterday, and he is now in

town. I'm to see him once more before he leaves."

"Will you send him to call on me?"

"Surely, if you wish!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley. "I'll ring you up by telephone while he is at my house, and notify you if he will call on you."

"An' der won't be less'n two of us callin' on her about that time," decided Steve.

"How are you getting along, my boy?"

"Well, pretty good for a raw hand, ma'am."

"That looks much better!" exclaimed the lady, approvingly. "It will answer for the rest of the dance, at all events."

"And der dance won't end ter-night by a long chalk," thought Steve.

"Dear me, Emily, I haven't my purse!" cried Mrs. Bradley, in some dismay, as she came down from the chair.

"Nor I, Myrtle."

"I must find my husband——"

"Never mind der settling, ma'am!" cried Steve, hurriedly jumping up and pulling off his cap. "It's all der same ter me. I don't care any more for der money than I would for one of me eyes. I'm all over der city every day, ma'am. Just gimme yer address, and I'll run in and get der pay when I'm going by—see?"

"Will that be satisfactory to you?" laughed Mrs. Bradley.

"Will it be satisfactory!" cried Steve. "I should say it would be. It'll be more'n that. It'll be agreeable."

Both women laughed at what struck them as Steve's quick wit, but neither suspected anything back of it.

"Well, my lad, we'll leave it that way, then," said the one he had served, patting him on the shoulder. "My name is Mrs. Prentiss Bradley, and I live at No. — Montgomery avenue. Can you remember?"

"Sure, ma'am, I've got it on me calling list already."

Though Steve now felt pretty sure that

he had run upon clues that would lead to an exposure of the skin game which then was being worked in that locality, he was too shrewd to go over the traces and spoil all by a hasty jump at conclusions. There was more to be accomplished than merely the bare exposure of the infamous enterprise.

"The whole gang must be took!" Steve resolutely decided. "Any kid with eyes and ears could do the job as far as I've gone, an' what would be the good of pulling in those two duffers at this stage of the game?"

"I've got to find out where the stiffs come from, an' who skins 'em, an' who does the tanning, an' makes the shoes an' sells 'em! Holy smoke but there must be a big gang on the job! But with the whole force ter back me up, I'm der kid as can land 'em!"

These were thoughts passing through Steve's mind, when the two women returned to the ball-room, and he already had fixed in his memory the names of both, as well as the address given him.

Before they fairly were lost from view in the crowd on the ball-room floor, he again caught sight of the man called Meckleburg. The Jew now had on his overcoat and carried his hat in his hand, and he evidently was about departing.

"It's the chance of a lifetime!" Steve said to himself. "I'll shadder the blooming guy and see where he lives."

Leaving his brushes where they lay, Steve quickly put on his coat, and having satisfied himself that his movements were not observed by Dr. Gray, he slipped out through the crowd and overtook the Jew before the latter had reached the sidewalk.

Steve found it an easy job to follow him, for the man growled a refusal to the immediate advances of the numerous cab-men outside, and hurriedly started off afoot.

It then was approaching midnight, and it was long after that when Meckleburg

halted at a small wooden house in one of the side streets off Spring avenue, and let himself in with a latch-key.

"It's safe enough that's where he hangs out," thought Steve, who never once had lost sight of him. "And now I'll lay off till to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

STEVE MAKES AN ARREST.

At about ten o'clock on the following Friday morning Mrs. Emily Markham received a telephone call from her friend Mrs. Bradley, informing her that the shoe peddler was at the latter's residence, and would call at her house a half-hour later, if desired.

This was precisely what Mrs. Markham did desire, for she wanted none of the fashionable women of Allegheny to wear ties superior to her own; and she immediately gave instructions to the servant that the young man who would call presently should at once be shown to her boudoir.

These instructions were obeyed in much less than half an hour, however; and the lady, reclining in partial *negligee* in an easy-chair in her elaborate chamber, was greatly surprised on beholding the young man who hurriedly entered.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, half rising. "Are you the shoe peddler?"

"Der shoe peddler? I should say not, ma'am. I'm der kid as comes in ahead of der fly chap with der shoes."

"Dear me! Aren't you the boy I saw at the ball night before last?"

"I'm der same kid, ma'am, only me togs is different. But I'm on der same lay."

"The same what?" cried Mrs. Markham, quite startled.

"Der same lay. Der skin game," Steve vaguely explained. "I's come here ter give yer a tip, an' ask yer to help me out."

"Dear me!" and the lady began to laugh; "I'm afraid I cannot understand you. Where is the shoe peddler?"

"He's down ter der odder woman's house. I's been piping off der place for near two days now, waiting for his jags to show up. I'd begun ter think he'd flew der coop but he came up smiling this morning, an' I reckon he'll soon be here. Didn't der woman that had the fly shoes tell yer he was coming?"

"Why, yes, I had such a message. But what do you want of the man?"

"Me and Chief O'Mara wants him the worst way. Yer see, ma'am——"

"Do you mean Chief O'Mara of the police?"

"Sure thing, ma'am. I'm one of der force. See, here's me badge."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham, now vaguely beginning to take in the possible situation; "is this peddler a criminal?"

"We suspects he is, ma'am, that's why I'm on der lay here," Steve hurriedly rejoined. "I could had him pinched at der odder woman's house, d'ye see? only she'd made deals with him before, and I wanted ter get on ter just what game der bloke is working. So I says to myself, if der odder woman, that's you, ma'am, will string him along so's I can pipe off what he says, I'll have him dead ter rights. Are yer on?"

Of course Mrs. Markham looked very much surprised and not a little dismayed, but the intense earnestness of Steve and the manifest interest he seemed to have at stake, went even further to influence her to his desire, than her vague appreciation of the facts and his asserted association with the police department.

"Do you mean that you want me to receive the man here and bargain with him precisely as if nothing had occurred?" she demanded, rising to glance from the window.

"That's just der cheese, ma'am!" cried Steve, eagerly.

"But why didn't Chief O'Mara send an officer here?"

"Ain't I an officer?" demanded Steve, with a resentful glare. "Der chief wouldn't take one man off der case an' put on another, would he?"

"But you surely cannot arrest this peddler. You're only a boy."

"Is dat so? Well, I've got a copper down below that will pinch him just de second I give him der word. Don't you have any dreams that der shoe man'll get der best of me."

"But of what is he guilty?"

"Der shoes he's selling are made of human skins, ma'am, tanned and——"

"What?" interrupted Mrs. Markham, inexpressibly shocked. "You surely don't mean that!"

"That's der size of it, ma'am, and all we're looking for is der proof."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham.

"There's a whole gang in der business, ma'am, but we are laying for this one first for fear he'll jump der town. After we get der shoes and have him in limbo, we're going for der others like a bull at a gate. But it's got to be done on the quiet——see? So's der gang won't git onter it."

"But I cannot lend myself to such an arrest here in my house!" cried Mrs. Markham.

"Oh, come off der high hoss! Say, youse wouldn't want ter be skinned after you're dead, would yer, and have some bloke selling yer skin to make shoes? Do der square thing. Gimme der chance ter get at der duffer; and say, ma'am, there he comes now! Look at him! Der guy with der little bag. He's coming in the front gate. You let him come up here and leave me ter——"

"Wait one moment," interposed Mrs. Markham.

She had become quite pale and dis-

turbed; but Steve's argument was too forcible to be resisted, and when she observed from the window the dapper young man to whom he pointed, and thought of the outrage of which he possibly was guilty, she yielded to Steve's request.

Stepping to the head of the stairs, she called down to the servant:

"Show the caller up here when he rings, Mary."

And the ring sounded almost while she spoke.

"Are you going to remain here?" she cried to Steve, as she returned to the chamber.

"I'll show up in about a minute, ma'am," cried Steve. "And when I come in, you give him der brace that I'm yer son. Are yer on?"

"I think so," gasped Mrs. Markham.

"But yer don't want ter look so white around der gills," Steve hurriedly whispered. "Git a bracer. Pull yerself together. No guy like him ougliter jar yer for a minute. I'll not let him hurt yer. He's coming, ma'am. Now don't youse queer der game!"

Leaving Mrs. Markham more composed, Steve hurriedly slipped out of the room by a rear door, and flew off on a very brief mission of his own.

Just then the shoe peddler appeared at the hall door. He was a slick little fellow, with a sort of a foreign face, as if French or Italian, and was very nicely dressed.

"Mrs. Markham?" he said, bowing on the threshold.

"I'm the lady," was the reply.

She had resumed her seat and looked decidedly easy and comfortable, as a fashionable lady should.

"You may come in, sir," she added. "I presume you are the man Mrs. Bradley telephoned me about, the one who has shoes to sell."

"The same, madam," bowed the man, entering and placing a leather satchel on

the floor. "She informed me I might find in you a customer."

"Very possibly," said Mrs. Markham, indolently. "I'll look at the shoes if you care to display them."

The peddler bowed obsequiously and dropped to one knee on the floor in front of her and prepared to open his case.

At the same moment Steve returned to the room.

The peddler looked up, gave a start of surprise, and seemed about to close the bag. But Mrs. Markham quickly interposed.

"Come in, Johnny," she said, extending her hand to Steve. "This is only my little boy, sir. You needn't mind him."

"Yas, I'm her little boy! Who's der man, ma?" drawled Steve, adding to himself: "Holy smoke, ain't she a peach? Her little boy! Wouldn't that flood yer cellar?"

"He is a gentleman who has some shoes to sell, Johnny, dear," said Mrs. Markham, smiling. "Come here and stand beside me and don't bother the gentleman."

"Oh, no, I won't do a thing to him," thought Steve.

The peddler felt re-assured, and now began showing his goods.

"Mrs. Bradley is a very good customer of mine," he said, looking up with one of the dainty ties poised in his hand, "and she informed me that I could safely deal with you in a rather confidential way."

"Why in a confidential way, sir?"

"Because this make of shoes, madam, is not on the general market," the peddler explained, in a very smooth way. "They are made in Paris, and are brought into this country only for the purpose of supplying the very best class of ladies."

"Ah, I see! Do you mean that they are smuggled?"

The peddler smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You wouldn't expect me to say so if they were, madam," he rejoined. "And

you, of course, would feel quite as easy, providing you bought them, if you were not informed of the precise facts. The shoes are very rare, and can be purchased only in the way mentioned. We are very cautious as to whom we sell them."

"Can't they be bought in the stores?" demanded Steve, innocently.

"The stores don't carry such goods as these, my boy."

"Let me take one," said Mrs. Markham.

"I think this is about your size, madam. If you will allow me to fit the other to your foot, you will——"

"Say, ma!" interrupted Steve, taking the shoe from her hand, "ain't der leather soft?"

"Very!"

"It's most as soft as yer skin, ain't it?"

"See here, youngster!" cried the peddler, evidently startled; "look out you don't soil the tie."

"Who's going ter soil it?"

"What is the price of the shoes, sir?"

"We are obliged, because of their quality, to get fifty dollars for them, madam."

"What! Why, that's an awful price."

"It's all on account of the leather, ma!" cried Steve. "Can't you see what kind of leather 'tis?"

"See here, my boy——"

"Oh, you go chase yerself!" Steve sharply interrupted. "I'm onto der leather, an' don't you make no mistake. I saw some just like it at der tannery——"

"Here, give me the shoe!" cried the peddler, now quite pale and excited.

"Aw, forget it!" cried Steve. "I'm onto your curves, ole man! I'm wise ter der kind of goods you're selling. This leather was der skin of a man, an' yer can't fool me with yer smuggling story. If yer——"

But Steve got no further.

The peddler sprang to his feet with a cry of mingled dismay and alarm, and

snatched the shoe from Steve's hand and hastened to thrust it back into the bag.

"I didn't come here to be insulted!" he cried, glaring both at Mrs. Markham and Steve. "You'll have to excuse me."

Then he made a dive for the door at the top of his speed.

But he ran straight into the arms of Inspector Garrity, who suddenly appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"Say, youse don't want ter be in a hurry!" cried Steve. "Yer might fall down the stairs. What der yer say, inspector? Ain't this der guy we're after?"

"There's no doubt about that, Steve," laughed the burly detective. "Come, come, my man, shove your hands into these bracelets and keep quiet. We want you at headquarters."

"For what?" demanded the peddler, as white as chalk. "I haven't done anything."

"Well, well, you'll have a chance to tell that to Chief O'Mara," said Garrity, curtly. "You must go along with me."

It took but a few minutes to explain the precise situation to Mrs. Markham, and caution her to say nothing about the arrest; and after having apologized for the intrusion into her house, the three at once made their departure and entered a carriage awaiting them at the nearest corner.

Half an hour later they arrived in the chief's office at the police headquarters.

Before this, however, the peddler had tumbled to the fact that his arrest was but the first move against the gang with which he was identified; and, except to declare that he himself had made the shoes of leather he had purchased abroad, he refused to open his mouth.

Upon searching him, however, a letter was found evidently bearing his name, which was Francis Patten, and which read as follows:

"PITTSBURG, Wed. night.

"MY DEAR PATTEN: I have seen the

doctor to-night, and he will try to get the rags for me by the first of the week. Two bundles. It will take a few days to get them in shape, but by next week I will have a few more pairs ready. I am to call on the doctor Saturday night, and then shall learn the precise condition of the rag market. Don't come to my house before the last of next week.

"MECKLEBURG."

"It is very evident that this Meckleburg is the maker of these shoes," said Chief O'Mara, the moment he read the letter. "I will submit the leather to an expert, and if I find the truth to be what we suspect, we will take steps at once to locate this entire gang. Meantime, this fellow's arrest must be kept secret."

That afternoon the suspected fact was established. The shoes undoubtedly were made from tanned human skins. Patten, however, refused to divulge anything concerning his confederates; and the work of locating the parties who provided the bodies, and those guilty of tanning the skins removed from them, was first assigned to Steve Manley, partly because of the success he already had achieved, and partly because the necessary movements were least likely to create suspicion if undertaken by a boy.

CHAPTER IV.

STEVE GETS INTO A BOX.

In the attempt to locate various parties identified with the skin game, Steve Manley knew that he was at odds with men who probably had very little respect for a dead body, and who would put him under the sod in a minute, sooner than suffer exposure and arrest.

But Steve was possessed of mettle not easily daunted, and he went at the work with a will.

At eight o'clock the next evening, that mentioned in Meckleburg's letter to Patten, Steve might have been seen shadowing the Jew through the streets of Pittsburgh and in the direction of Herron Hill.

He followed Meckleburg until the latter entered a single brick house on one of the side avenues, on the door of which was a polished brass sign bearing the name of Dr. Richard Gray.

"He's der doctor I saw at der ball," Steve instantly decided. "And der Jew has come here to git der two skins, or I'm away off my trolley. I'll see can I get a look into der joint."

The front of the house was in darkness, save a dim light in the hall; and the curtains of a rear side room, which was the physician's office, were closely drawn.

"They don't give a man half a show," Steve grumbled, standing off to survey the grim dwelling with the eye of a professional cracksman. "There ain't a window, even what a feller can lift without a derrick. But I have got ter git into der crib. I can't get on to der plant they're putting up by standing out here like a wooden cigar sign. I'll give der back door a try."

But on going to the rear of the house Steve found himself no better off. Every room was in darkness, and the doors and windows were securely closed.

Back of the house Steve found a deep yard, with a small stable, and the entire place was separated from a narrow back street by a high wooden fence, with pointed nails along the top to prevent scaling.

Evidently the doctor wanted no intruders on his premises, and the back street and yard were enveloped in darkness.

"Well, wouldn't this jar yer," Steve disgustedly growled, when he found himself utterly unable to effect an entrance.

"Whoever thought those two duffers would have done this ter me? If I was a Rube or a jay 'twould be different. Yer'd kind of expect it. But der idea of their being able ter do it ter me. If I could only get me lamps on 'em I'd—— Hello, what's der team stopping for?"

A heavy wagon had come to a stop in

the narrow back street. It sounded like a dray or a farm wagon. Then Steve heard a deep voice roughly address one of the two horses.

"Stand still; can't yer? D'ye want to wake the whole street? Whoa, now, you brute."

"By der sound of his voice the guy himself is der biggest brute," said Steve, as he stole hurriedly through the yard to peek through a crack in the fence.

The street was narrow and dark, with only a few scattering houses at one end.

In the gloom outside were the dim outlines of a heavy wagon, with a pair of truck horses attached to it.

Steve could not tell what the wagon contained, yet the faint starlight vaguely revealed a load of some sort, with what appeared to be a covering of something light.

While he still was trying to make out why the driver had stopped there, the man suddenly left the horse at which he was sullenly growling and approached the fence. He was a huge, whiskered fellow, dressed in a truckman's garb, and would have weighed two hundred strong.

The next moment Steve heard the sharp snap of a wire, as when a bell is pulled, and it instantly was followed by a faint ringing of the bell itself, which was evidently in the physician's house.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Steve. "I'm blowed if the blooming farmer ain't coming here with the load. Mebbe it's hay for der doctor's torowbred. I reckon I'd better lay low till the guy has his say. In der ring with a heavy-weight like him, I'd be put out in a punch."

Stealing softly along back of the fence, Steve threw himself flat upon the ground behind a corner of the stable, yet within easy view of the house.

He hardly had concealed himself before a broad stream of light shot out across the yard.

A wide door in the rear wall of the

house suddenly had been opened, revealing a large, square room within, which appeared to be entirely unfurnished. From this the stream of light came, and two men quickly sprang down to the ground, for the sill of the door was nearly three feet from the earth. Then they hastened towards the back fence.

"Der Jew and der doctor," said Steve to himself. "Hully geel but der game's opening better'n I thought."

"Mine gracious, dogdor! If he has only got der—"

"Shut up!" sternly commanded Gray, as the two men passed almost within an arm's length of where Steve was lying. "How do you know who may be out there?"

"But it musd—"

"Silence!"

"They're mortally afraid of something," thought Steve.

He glanced towards the house. The broad door still was wide open. He was almost tempted to undertake stealing across the yard and slipping in, but it then was so light out there that the chance of escaping detection was too great to be taken.

Then he saw Gray bend closer to the fence.

"Who is there?" he called, softly.

"Who the devil do you suppose?" came back the gruff answer.

"That's Meester Foley's voice, dogdor!" cried Meckleburg, joyously rubbing his hands.

"It sounded like it."

"Oh, I know it vos! I'd know it among a tousand—among ten tousand, dogdor!"

"Open the gate," growled Foley, from outside. "D'ye think I want my team standing here till a copper snatches it, and mebbe me along with it?"

But Gray already was engaged in removing a heavy joist from across the

broad gate, and presently he swung it open.

"Hello, Foley," he said, curtly, on seeing the man's face.

"Hello, yerself. What was the matter with you—asleep? You were a long time getting out here."

"Have you gud 'em, Meester Foley? Tell me der first of all, have you gud 'em?"

"Got 'em," growled Foley, half raising his heavy whip at the cringing Jew. "Of course I've got 'em. What d'ye suppose I drove away in here for? To exercise my hosses?"

"Shut up and drive in here!" cried Gray, sternly. "Should any one overhear, you'd lay yourself liable. Bring in your team, Foley."

The burly teamster obeyed, and by a dint of growling at and kicking his off horse, he succeeded in entering the yard with his load, and in backing the team close up against the open door of the house.

Meantime Dr. Gray had again closed and secured the gate.

"What have you brought, Foley?" he demanded, as he hurriedly rejoined them at the door.

"Two boxes and one of the big trunks," replied the truckman, with decidedly grim complacency.

"How many in the trunk?"

"Five of 'em, doctor."

"Only five?"

"That's all there was ripe."

"Der guy must be bringing in a load of melons," thought Steve, crawling out as near as he dared.

"That makes seven in all, then?"

"That's what," nodded the teamster.

"Lend a hand here, Meckleburg, and we will get them unloaded!" Gray now cried, sharply.

"Not yet, by a long shot!" exclaimed Foley, clambering over the rear wheel to enter the receiving room.

"What do you mean?"

"Trot out yer Redeye first, Gray, if it's all the same to you. I'm as dry as a smoked fish."

"Yes, yes, dogdor, let goot Meester Foley vet his vhistle," put in the Jew, who appeared very much elated over the truckman's arrival and was dancing about with much animation.

"First let Meester Foley vet his vhistle. Then I'll lend bote of my hands, and ve'll unload 'em. I vos so glad der goots has arrived at last."

"Come in, then, and have your drink, and be done with it!" cried Gray, springing up into the room. "And look sharp about it. I want these things gotten under cover, and the sooner it's done the better. Then I've a word to say in the ears of you two."

Without waiting to explain further, he quickly led the others into an adjoining room, beyond which was the hall of the house. There he produced from a cupboard a bottle and several glasses, and placed them upon the table.

Steve was not slow to avail himself of the slightest opportunity, let the occasion be whatsoever.

"This is der chance I have been looking for," he said to himself, clambering quickly to his feet and hurrying across the yard. "If der sawbones has got something to say to these two duffers, I's got to be where I can take in the merry dialogue. And this is der chance ter get into der theater on a free pass."

But the chance did not prove to be as good as Steve had anticipated.

The voices of the three men in the next room were plainly audible, and to reach undetected the hall beyond was utterly impossible.

Moreover, the room into which Steve now was gazing offered not the slightest concealment. It was a large, square room, nearly as cold and bare as an ice house, with only a number of long shelves on one

side, an open sink in one corner, and an ordinary deal board dissecting table in the middle of the floor.

"Hully gee? this is der doctor's factory!" muttered Steve, hurriedly surveying the place. "And a mouse couldn't hide himself in there."

Then he turned to the team near which he was standing, and made a hurried examination of that.

It was a heavy farm wagon, evidently, and the light cover he previously had observed was only a lot of loose straw.

Thrusting his arm beneath this, Steve quickly felt the outlines of two long boxes. Nearer the rear of the wagon he found also the huge trunk, to which the truckman had referred.

"If this was only empty—— Hully gee! 'tain't locked!"

He made the discovery while the thought was running through his mind.

Then he wriggled himself into the team and under the straw, and found that he easily could raise the lid of the trunk.

Feeling into it, he found a layer of straw, which evidently covered something beneath it; but the trunk itself was less than half filled.

"This does settle it, and no mistake! I'll take der chance they don't open it before I can get out and make a sneak. If der trunk goes in, I goes with it, and don't you forget it."

By a bit of worming about, the brave youth effected the move without disturbing the loose straw covering of the teamster's load; and within half a minute he was securely settled in the trunk, with the top down.

Yet he scarce had accomplished the feat when he heard the heavy tread of the three returning men.

They were coming to unload the team.

At the same moment Steve's hand slid down through the straw in the trunk and came in contact with that portion of the contents which was beneath him.

At first he thought he had touched a piece of ice.

Then he felt hair as fine as the finest silk, and then a tiny ear—and then he suddenly realized that his hand was in contact with the head of a dead child.

For an instant his blood turned colder than ice itself.

Then he heard the Jew's voice.

"Now, Meester Foley, ve'll help you bring 'em in. It vos vonderful, vonderful, Meester Foley, vat chooze can be made from der hide of a man. So help me gracious, der vimen vos like children with a new toy der moment dey see dem. It's vonderful vat a woman will pay for a thing that she wants. But der chooze is worth der price, Meester Foley!"

The infernal, mercenary viciousness of the man was sufficient to stir even the vengeful bitterness of a boy.

"I'll round up that ugly guy, or he gets my skin along with der others," said Steve to himself, gritting his teeth. "There is no help for it, now. I's got to go in with der poor little kids. Five of 'em! And I thought they was a load of melons! There's no help for it, now. But they'll keep still—that's one satisfaction!"

CHAPTER V.

A PROPOSED MEETING.

The next moment Steve heard Foley mount the team and begin to throw off the covering to the ground at one side.

"Get hold, there, you blarsted Israelite!" he presently growled, when he had cleared the load of its covering. "Help haul off this trunk!"

"Vat's in der trunk, Meester Foley? It's der heaviest trunk I never saw."

Steve heard the words and his heart leaped into his mouth.

Would Foley notice the extra weight and examine the trunk to learn the cause?

It was a moment of awful suspense to the young detective. But Foley was too intent on getting through with the job, and Steve felt an unutterable sense of relief on hearing the truckman say, simply:

"There's nothing in it that you want."

"But there's something in it that wants you!" thought Steve, wondering how the desperate episode was likely to terminate.

"You vos quite sure there isn't, Meester Foley? I vos in hopes——"

"There are only five cigarettes in there," interrupted Foley, grimly, "and they are for the doctor and his students. 'Get hold here, I say.'"

Then Steve felt the heavy trunk yanked round by one of its handles, and then it was hauled heavily off and deposited on the floor of the room.

"Drag it over in that corner!" cried Gray, now rejoining the others. "I'll look after what's in it to-morrow. Make room for the other two."

"Vy, certainly, dogdor!"

Following the trunk came the two long boxes, which were placed one upon the other at the opposite side of the room.

Steve peered out from under the lid of the trunk, and now a glance told him what the two boxes contained.

"Bodies from some place," he decided. "An' der next job for me is ter find out where der things come from."

These also having been hauled into the room, Foley next sprang down outside, and threw the loose straw back into the body of the wagon. Then he clambered back into the room again, leaving the team standing in the yard; and the young physician quickly closed and secured the heavy door.

Steve had gained his point and now was inside of the house. And he now understood that this great, bare room was the physician's operating and dissecting-room, and that the several shelves at one

side were the depositories for human bodies.

This, too, accounted for the exceeding coldness of the room, the temperature of which was about like that of an ice-box.

"Vos these der bodies of men or vimen, goot Meester Foley?" said the Jew, in wheedling tones, as Foley returned to the room.

"They're both men."

"Ah, vat goot fortune! Der hide of a man makes much der better leather for chooze. You vos a long dime supplying us, goot Meester Foley."

"Well, I couldn't bring 'em in before they croaked, could I, you infernal contortionist?"

"Before dey vos dead, you mean? Ah, but you might have hastened it a leedle. Der peezezz vos so goot that these men vos vorth more dead than alive. The last pair of chooze has gone out of my shop, and goot Meester Patten sold seven pairs in Harrisburg last week. At this rate, each body is vorth about——"

"You close your trap, Meckleburg," Dr. Gray now commanded, turning from locking the door.

"I'll not bother to take away the boxes this trip; store 'em away till I'm in town again. I'll take 'em next time."

"There may be no next time," returned Gray, curtly.

"No nexd dime, dogdor?"

"That's what I said. But I'll look after the boxes. They'll make good kindling wood, if nothing else," rejoined Gray, whose face had worn a steady frown since Foley's arrival with the bodies.

"Go into my office, both of you," he added, sharply. "I've something to say to you."

Then Steve heard them leave the room.

The doctor closed the door after them, but did not lock it, and presently the sound of their steps died away in the hall.

Then Steve made another move.

"Der villain is off, and it's time der

leading man came on," he said to himself.

Softly raising the lid of the trunk, he left his close quarters, and made sure to close the trunk after him.

Creeping to the door by which the men had departed, he softly opened it and let himself into the adjoining room.

It was an agreeable change from that of the doctor's dead room.

"The lodgers in there don't bother with yer much, but they ain't companionable," he said to himself, as he left the place. "They don't even blush when they give yer der cold shoulder. Now for der sawbones, der Jew and der truckman. Tree of a kind! And since I'm always straight, I'd oughter beat 'em dead easy. The dialogue they puts up oughter be worth the hearing."

Then the sound of their voices reached Steve's ears. The men were in an office off one side of the deep main hall of the house.

Selecting a corner near the rise of the stairs, Steve lay down upon the floor, safe from probable discovery, and listened.

"No, Foley, I don't want you to come here again, unless I countermand this order," the physician was forcibly saying. "I told you this might be the last visit, and I repeat it."

"But, dogdor——"

"Shut up, Meckleburg, and I'll explain," interrupted Gray, sharply. "I'm beginning to feel that this business is no longer safe."

"It never was safe," growled Foley, with a toss of his huge head. "But the most money ain't made in the safest schemes."

"I've something to consider besides the money," retorted the doctor. "I'm thinking of leaving here and going to Cleveland. Without knowing precisely why, I feel that it is getting warm around here, and I may decide to light out."

"When are you going?"

"I have no definite plans as yet."

"You vos afraid without reason, dogdor!" cried Meckleburg, in accents of regret. "The peezness vosn't suspected. Never in der world. And you have a legal right to buy der bodies and bring 'em here to your house. A legal right, dogdor!"

"I'm aware of all that," returned Gray, "yet I might find it difficult to show what use I have for so many of them. I'll have no more of them brought here for the present, and that settles it!"

"But vat are ve going to do if you go out of the ledder trust?" protested Meckleburg, throwing up his hands with a dismal groan.

"You can ring in some other doctor to take my place."

"But that ain't so easy. Der other dogdors ain't all so vize as you. Think of der goot money ve give you for every skin. I could use a dozen of 'em, if I could only get 'em."

"There'll be another ready by Monday," growled Foley, who was inclined to side with the Jew in this matter.

"Think of that, dogdor; there'll be anudder ready by Monday."

"Well you cannot bring him here!" cried Gray, very decidedly. "I cannot have these others ready before Monday, and that settles it."

"But, goodness gracious, dogdor, I must have der skin! Is der party a man or a woman, goot Meester Foley?"

"He is a man, and a big one."

"Vat's der matter vid him?"

"He had a stroke, and is dying."

"Vat a shame der stroke didn't finish der job at vunce. Then you could have brought him in vid der odders."

"I'll not have him brought here, as the matter now stands," the physician again protested.

"But I musd have the skin, dogdor," persisted the Jew.

"Send him direct to the tannery, then."

"To der tannery?"

"Yes, and let them remove it out there."

"Oh, goodness gracious, dogdor, that von't do at all!" cried Meckleburg, rising to pace the floor in dismal excitement.

"Why won't it do?"

"Dose tanners vos only churnimen, when it comes to taking der skin off of a man," protested Meckleburg, wildly waving his hands. "They vould ruin it entirely. I vouldn't think of letting them do it, not for der world."

"I'll tell you what you can do about it!" cried Foley, turning to the physician. "If you don't want him brought here, I'll tell you what you can do."

"What's that?"

"When are the others to be ready?"

"Not before Monday," said Gray, decidedly.

"Shall you take them out to the yards yourself?"

"Yes, that was my intention," grimly nodded the doctor. "I want to have a talk with the parties out there, also."

"In that case," suggested Foley; "I will drive the man over there Monday morning, instead of bringing him here, and you can do the job at the yards."

"That's der very thing, dogdor!"

"Well, I don't object to that," rejoined Gray, presently.

Yet his face, if it were read aright, indicated that he had some other object in so readily consenting to the plan proposed.

"But how do you know that this man will be dead by Monday morning?" he quickly added.

"There is no doubt about that part of it," returned Foley. "He was near enough to it when I came away this afternoon."

"Couldn't it be hastened a leedle, if necessary?" demanded Meckleburg, with

immediate apprehensions. "Think vat der returns vill be when der vork is all done."

"It will not be necessary, I tell you!" cried Foley, quite angrily.

"We will leave it in that way, then," said Dr. Gay, abruptly rising. "I will bring the other two out to the tannery shortly after noon, Monday, and you may meet me theré with the other party."

"That will be all right; I will drive over there during the morning."

"And I'll come out to der yards, also," cried Meckleburg, eagerly. "Ve can have a nice leedle house party. Ve can have a leedle peezezz meeting of der ledder trust right in der tannery."

The physician did not say that this plan would suit him to the letter; but, nevertheless, he thought it, and an expression vaguely pictured in his thin white face also showed it.

"Well," demanded Foley, looking up at him, "have you said your little verse?"

"For the present, yes," replied Gray.

"Then I think I'll be going."

"You needn't hurry."

"I've a long drive before me."

"Will you have another drink before leaving?"

"I'll have two, if it's all the same to you," said Foley, with a laugh.

"Quite so," rejoined Gray, readily. "You needn't rise; I'll bring the glasses in here."

Steve crouched lower under the stairs.

The physician strode from his office and through the hall, passing so near Steve that he might have touched him; yet the young detective luckily escaped observation.

Having procured the liquor and glasses from the side room, Dr. Gray immediately rejoined his confederates.

Steve decided it was time for him to make a sneak.

"Der farmer is going back where der bodies came from," he said to himself.

"Mebbe der trolley cars don't run out his way, so I'll go in der victoria along with him."

"If there's going to be a meeting of der leather trust, sure all of der stockholders ougchter be represented. I thinks I'll try ter get inter der meeting by proxy."

CHAPTER VI.

STEVE MAKES A HIT WITH FOLEY.

Slipping along the floor with the silent sinuosity of a snake, Steve looked up and down the hall.

The door of the doctor's office was standing open, and to pass it and reach the front door of the house without being seen or heard, Steve decided to be impossible.

Ten feet from the break of the stairs under which he was lying there was a closed door which evidently opened upon a stairway leading to the basement of the house.

"I reckon that's der only avenoo open for der public," Steve was forced to conclude. "I could go by the way I came in, only der sawbones locked der door and put der key in his kit. Mebbe he was afraid der other occupants of der place would get a move on."

"Well, here goes for a seat in der front hock!"

Quietly rising, he stole softly down the carpeted hall, and with his gaze steadily fixed on the door of the doctor's office, he halted at that leading to the cellar.

Taking an opportunity when the men were talking loudest, he quietly turned the knob.

The door yielded to his pressure.

A flight of stairs was before him.

Quickly slipping out of view, Steve softly closed the door after him, and warily felt his way along the wall and down the stairs.

They led him directly into a room under the dead room.

At the rear of this was a narrow window, some four feet from the ground. It swung down on hinges, and was secured at the bottom with a wooden button.

To open this window and crawl out into the back yard was but child's play, and, within another moment, Steve was standing beside the wagon in the gloom of the yard.

One of the teamster's horses heard him, and gave vent to a shrill neigh.

"That's der call ter get aboard!" muttered Steve. "An' it's safe der cap'n of der craft will respond to der notice."

For Steve to clamber over the wheel and into the body of the wagon was the work of but a moment.

Then he quickly made a hole in the loose straw which Foley had replaced in the wagon, and covered himself in a way to preclude probable observation.

"Now, then, der caravan can start when ever der boss is ready," he chuckled, cheerfully. "He'll have a livelier load ter take out than der one he brought in."

"It's safe enough I turn down der next trick, fur this kind of work is my long suit. By to-morrow I'll know where the bodies come from, and by Monday I'll be onto der tannery."

"That'll gimme der top hand, an' then I rakes in der whole pot."

"Hully gee! Wouldn't der chief open his face with a grin could lie see der kingpin of der force at just this moment?"

These gratulations hardly had crossed Steve's mind when the three men emerged from the house.

"Open the gate for me, Dr. Gray, and I'll be off at once," said Foley, feeling around on the ground until he had found his whip.

"All right, Jim."

"You'll be sure der man is ready by Monday, von't you, goot Meester Foley?" pleaded Meckleburg, hanging to the teamster as if to a long-lost friend.

"He'll be ready right enough," growled the other. "He's most ready now."

The man turned the team in the yard, then mounted to the seat.

He gave only one glance back into the body of the wagon, but Steve was then safe enough from observation.

"So long, Meckleburg!" he growled, with a friendliness indicating him to be a more kindly ruffian at heart than his general conduct manifested. "See you Monday."

"Yes, Meester Foley, vidout fail!" cried the miscreant, dancing along beside the moving team. "And be sure you bring der man, Meester Foley; be sure you bring der man!"

"You're an infernal rat!" returned Foley, bluntly.

"Drive quietly till you have left this back street, Jim," cautioned Dr. Gray as the heavy team lumbered through the gate.

"All right, Dick."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

Then the gate in the back fence closed behind team and man and boy; and shut out from the world the still, cold forms within, designed by God and nature for return to no such base uses as those outrageously intended.

It took only a few minutes to leave the gloomy back street, and within the next half hour the outskirts of the city itself were left behind.

Instead of the rumbling pavements, came the soft earth of the suburban roads.

Instead of the heavy atmosphere of the city, came the free, sweet air of the country, and the sweep of the night breeze.

By these signs only could Steve Manley tell where they were; but whither they were going still remained a mystery.

He dared not look out to see in what direction they were departing, for the least rustle of the straw might betray him.

Once out of the city, Foley let the team set their own pace, which was slow enough.

The man himself nodded for a time, then began humming a church tune.

An hour passed; then a second and third; and Steve, cramped and sore, for a jolting board is a hard bed, wondered if the journey was never coming to an end.

Then, when it was long after midnight, Foley made a move.

First he yawned heavily, then tied the reins around the whipstock.

Evidently he had decided that the animals knew the way home as well as he did.

Then, with another deep-drawn yawn, he threw his legs over the wagon seat and prepared to tumble himself over upon the straw, to sleep out the balance of the journey.

"Hully gee! I'm blowed if the blooming guy ain't coming down here!" thought Steve, with a thrill of dismay.

And before the startled youngster could frame another comment, the teamster had rolled off the seat and down into the straw, squarely on top of the motionless young detective.

It was a situation to have tried the nerve of a man, but a boy as clever as Steve was more than equal to it.

"Here, what youse doing, you blooming jay?" he cried, as a roar of amazement broke from Foley, and both began a scramble to get uppermost in the straw.

"Ain't there room enough in der team for der two of us? D'ye want der whole bed? Couldn't yer turn in widout waking me up, an' spoiling der dream I was having? Youse give me a pain in der side!"

By this time both man and boy had managed to emerge from the scrabble, and now were sitting upright in the straw, Steve glaring defiantly at the astonished teamster, and Foley staring back at him with an expression on his bearded face that would utterly defy description.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" Foley at last found voice to ask.

"What's that got to do with waking me up out of a sound sleep?" retorted Steve, in accents of resentful grievance. "Don't you know a kid what's growing needs plenty of sleep?"

"Look here——"

"Oh, you go chase yerself! Ain't I got a right to be on der earth? Was yer trying ter put out me light all at once, coming down on me like a thousand bricks? If youse half my size I'd take yer out in der road and put a new face on yer. I've a mind ter do it as it is—— Say, youse! 'tain't no laughing matter!"

Yet Steve felt much more like laughing than the other did, for a veritable roar of merriment had broken from the lungs of big Jim Foley, upon whom the utter absurdity of the scene and episode had dawned with all its force.

The audacious front Steve was putting up, the curious figure he cut, still half-buried in the straw, and the idea of the belligerent youngster threatening to take into the road a man five times his weight, with the intention of putting a new face on him—all combined to strike Jim Foley as being so ludicrous that not for a full minute could he check the roars of laughter that broke from him one after the other, sounding quite like thunder on the silence of the night.

There was not a house in sight.

The country road was winding between stretches of green meadows, backed by more remote woodlands, and the glitter of a myriad of stars in the purple sky was the only light that relieved the night darkness.

These were the features that quickly appealed to Steve, during the interval employed by Jim Foley in the enjoyment and final suppression of his boisterous laughing.

When, after several ineffectual attempts, for every time he looked at Steve, sitting

there so cool and defiant, his laughter broke forth anew—when, finally, he in part regained his composure, he cried, roundly:

"Well, you certainly have got more nerve for a little kid than any I ever clapped eyes on."

"Who are youse calling a little kid?" growled Steve, with a ferocious glare.

"Well, ain't you? You don't think you're a Cardiff giant, do you?"

"I'm big enough ter look out for myself."

"How did you come in the wagon, anyway?"

"I climbed in over the tailboard. How did yer sp'ose I came in—out of a burro-loon?"

"Where are you going?"

"Any old place suits me for a change."

"Don't you know where you're going?"

"Sure I knows where I'm going! I'm going along with you, if youse leaves me alone."

"Well, you don't think I'd chuck a kid like you out in the road four miles from the nearest house?" cried Foley, with another loud laugh.

"I'd find me way home if yer did."

"Have you got a home?"

"Sure I's got a home. D'y'e spose I lives in der air, like a bird?"

That Steve Manley was other than what he was pretending to be never for a moment entered Foley's head; and not only the loneliness of the ride, but also the cut of the boy's jib, inclined him greatly in Steve's favor.

"Do you live in Pittsburg?" he inquired.

"When I'm ter home I do," grinned Steve.

"Who do you live with?"

"With meself, of course. D'y'e think I was married, an' raising a family?"

"Who are your folks?"

"I ain't got any folks. I lodges in the Box hotel and takes me meals out."

"Where in thunder is the Box hotel?"

"Any old box. A shoe box, or a dry-goods box, when der wedder's warm."

"What do you do in the winter?"

"I sleep in der *Times* office. Der editor is a personal friend."

Foley rolled over in the straw and had another laugh, then came up to ask:

"Do you know how far you are from Pittsburg?"

"That don't bother me none," returned Steve. "All der places look alike ter me."

"Well, you're many a mile from the city."

"So much der better. Der country air is good for me health."

"Where did you get into the wagon?"

"When youse was driving along Centre avenue," Steve promptly replied. "I couldn't find nothing else ter steal, so I thought I'd steal a ride."

"And you fell asleep, eh?"

"Sure I did. It was like being in a cradle."

"What's your name?"

"Me name's Foley."

"What's that?" cried the teamster, with a broad grin and stare.

"Me name's Foley—Jimmy Foley!" cried Steve. "What's der matter wid yer ears? Don't yer know the United States langwidge?"

"Do you mean to tell me your name is Jimmy Foley?" roared the real Foley, with a boisterous manifestation of delight, and little dreaming the bold trick Steve was playing on him.

"Oh, you come off yer jolly!" cried Steve, in grieved tones. "Youse guying me now with yer laugh. Youse can't fill me up with no false music. I'm wise ter der curves of any they can put in der box. I'm clean wool, I am, and any er der gang'll tell yer Jimmy Foley's der real gent. Don't gimme der laugh unless yer means it. I'd rudder a man gimme der chilly mit."

Jimmy Foley was never so hoodwinked

in all his life. And never before had a single individual made so pronounced a hit with him.

The fact that Steve was clever tickled him immensely; but the announcement that his name was precisely the same as his own tickled him most of all.

"But the laugh is on the square, Jimmy Foley," he growled, fraternally, and thrust out his huge hand for Steve to grip. "And my name's Jim Foley also."

"Now youse giving me der jolly again!"

"On the level, I'm not. And to prove it, I'll take you along with me till I stop, and give you a bite to eat and a crib to sleep in. I'll put you up over Sunday, and, when some team is going into town, I'll send you back the way you come out, not afoot. Now, how does that hit you?"

"Right on der point of der chin," grinned Steve. "It knocks me out altogether."

And thus it was that young Steve Manley worked his way into the very heart of the skin game.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TABLES TURNED ON STEVE.

Steve's ride with Foley that night lasted a half hour longer.

It is quite needless to say that Steve cleverly fooled him during the balance of the journey, in much the same way as depicted, and, before the end of the trip, the burly ruffian was more than ever taken in by this fancy for his young companion.

At the end of the half hour they came upon the outskirts of an extensive farm, and several large buildings loomed up in view, with no end of stables, sheds and out-buildings.

"What kind of a joint is that, Mr. Foley?" asked Steve, now mounted upon the seat with the driver.

"That is one of the big poor farms, Jimmy."

"Der hosses seem kinder ter home. Is that where we're goin'?"

"Yes, that's where we're going, Jimmy."

"Do youse run the shebang?"

"There are two of us, but I'm the head of a certain part of it."

"I guess it must be der graveyard," thought Steve, but he did not say so aloud.

Foley drove the heavy team into the yard and thence to a large barn away out back, and Steve followed him down from the wagon and helped him unhitch the horses.

Steve was shrewd enough to know that Foley, if he was one of the head men, was doing this kind of work only because he was up to some illegal business which he had to conceal.

He now understood, also, how it was that Foley could supply Dr. Gray and the skin-game gang with so many dead bodies; for the several large buildings which he saw indicated that a large number of inmates were supported upon the place, many of whom doubtless came there to end their days.

"Come on, now, and we'll get a bite to eat," said Foley, as soon as the team was put up and the barn secured.

Steve followed him into one of the houses, and was glad enough to accept of the milk and food provided.

Next he was given a small room on the ground floor, and left to sleep out the night.

"Now, don't get up in the morning and run away before seeing me," growled Foley, just before he left him to go to his own room. "I want to show you around the place by daylight."

Steve promised to comply, and was as good as his word.

He had no idea of running away.

He was resolved first to learn where the tannery was located, and who was guilty of doing that part of the work.

It was nearly noon when he awoke, and Foley was looking in at the door. Steve hurriedly arose and dressed himself, and the most of the day, which was Sunday, was passed in surveying the entire place.

But the one feature of chief interest to Steve Manley was a small wooden house out beyond the barn and the sheds.

This building was the one in which the deceased inmates of the institution were temporarily placed before burial.

It was called the dead-house.

It that day contained but one body, that of a large man.

It was with this that Foley had promised to drive to the tannery with on the following morning.

"When do they plant him?" asked Steve, as they stood looking at his remains.

"He is not to be buried here," Foley explained, without the slightest suspicion that Steve had any particular interest in asking the question. "He is to be taken over to some friends of his, who live out quite a little piece."

Steve wanted to ask him who the friends were, and precisely where they could be found, but he decided that would be taking chances, and that he could learn for himself by shadowing the team on the following morning.

But there was a serious mishap in store for Steve, on which he could not then count.

Late in the afternoon, while strolling alone about a retired part of the grounds, he encountered a boy about his own age, who was bitterly crying.

Steve had a sympathetic streak in his nature, and it proved lucky for him that he had.

"What's der matter with yer, kid?" he asked, halting to address him.

"I'm crying because my father's dead," replied the boy, willing to make friends with the stranger.

"Is he der bloke who's over in der dead-house?"

"Yes, they're keeping him there till they bury him."

"Till they bury him, eh?"

"But I don't want him buried on the poor farm."

"Well, der ain't much danger of it," thought Steve, but he did not say so, for he had tumbled to the sensitive boy's feelings.

"How long have you and your old man been in this joint?" he asked.

"Only two days."

"What did yer come here for?"

"Because we had no money, and my father was dying. We were brought here by the constable."

"You ain't got any home, then?"

"Only here."

"What's yer name?"

"Tommy Jenks."

"That ain't such a very bad name," nodded Steve, who rather impressed the other boy with his businesslike air.

"Say, you don't happen ter know if there's a tannery anywhere round here, do yer?" he added.

"A what?"

"A tannery. A joint where they make leather."

"No, I don't."

"I didn't know but yer might be as wise as that," Steve dryly observed. "You'd better not cry any more. Like as not we'll find a way ter save yer father and plant him somewhere else. I'll speak ter der governor about it."

"I wish you would," the Jenks boy doubtfully rejoined, as Steve moved away.

Steve saw but little more of Foley that day, but at night he came round to show him to the same room he previously had occupied.

"I've got a team going into the city tomorrow afternoon," Foley said to him, before leaving him, "and you can ride back home if you like."

"That'll suit me all right," Steve answered, in order to avoid suspicion.

But he was glad that the team was not to go in the morning, for he then had the tannery affair on his hands. But early the next morning the incident occurred which changed the entire complexion of the situation, and put Steve Manley in jeopardy of his life.

Before he was fairly awake, Steve vaguely had the impression that some person was in his room.

And so there was.

Jim Foley had merely slipped in to call him for brekafast.

But the first thing he saw was Steve's vest hanging over the back of a chair, and the next thing he saw was the detective badge pinned under the lap of the collar.

Wondering what this might be, Mr. Jim Foley bent down and read the inscription on it.

Then his face changed like a flash, as he guessed the whole truth; and he rose with a half-smothered growl of rage, and looked fiercely at the boy in the bed.

But Steve had seen the whole business, and had instantly closed his eyes.

Foley thought him asleep, and he quietly left the room.

But he now suspected Steve's game from the very start, and he was laying his plans accordingly.

Steve remained in bed for a time, and thought the situation over.

"Der guy's onter my curves right enough," he reasoned. "And if I jump der joint, he'll be getting wise ter himself and take mighty good care not ter go out ter der tannery for fear I pipes him off."

"An' if I stay here, mebbe he'll skin me along with der odders. Well, I have ter take der chance of that song and dance. I've got ter find out where der tannery is by some game play, and der best thing I can do now is ter get up and

see what kind of a plant der big duffer'll try ter put up on me.

"Der guy is bigger than me, but I reckon I can give him a run for his money. Just the same, the rollers ain't greased so smooth as they were, for a fact."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TABLES TURNED AGAIN.

With the intention of ascertaining first of all at just what Jim Foley might have in mind to do about the case, Steve presently dressed himself and went out in search of the man.

He found Foley at one of the barns nearest the dead house, giving directions to two old men concerning the team in which the body was to be removed, and which was to be hitched out soon after breakfast.

Foley received him about the same as if nothing had happened, yet Steve thought he detected an ugly malice back of the man's grim smile.

"Hello, my lad!" said Foley, on seeing him approaching the door of the barn. "You are up and dressed, are you?"

"Sure thing, sir!" laughed Steve, with a quick nod. "I'm out getting an air cocktail to give me an appetite for my breakfast."

"Are you ready to go back to town this afternoon, in case I have a team going in?"

"I ain't in no rush to go," rejoined Steve. "Der Mayor said he could get along for a few days, in case I wanted ter stay away. Still, I'm ready to go, if you say so."

"We'll see about it a little later."

"Der fact is, I'm having very easy walking out here, you see; an' I don't mind staying as long as you'll keep me."

Steve gave him this bluff in order that Foley might not suspect that he knew his

identity was discovered, and it worked like a charm.

Foley grinned oddly and nodded his approval.

"How'd you like to take a ride with me this morning?" he asked, carelessly.

"It would suit me ter death," said Steve, promptly.

"You can go with me, then, if you like."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to take the body you saw yesterday over to the friends of the man," replied Foley, watching Steve's face with a rather searching gaze. "They live a few miles from here, and the ride will not be bad, if you feel like going."

"Sure I'll go!" exclaimed Steve. "What time do you start?"

"Oh, in the course of an hour or two. You go and get your breakfast and be ready to leave when I say."

"All right, sir."

Foley did not tell him that he could not then decide just when the start was to be made. He first had to get the body secretly aboard the team, and he was kept busy accomplishing this while Steve worked up the little scheme about to be described.

"Der blooming lobster wants ter get me over to der tannery and do me up," Steve shrewdly decided, as he walked back to the house. "Here's a nice mess for a kid to be in!"

He did not lose heart, however; far from it.

He was determined to know just where the tannery was located, let the cost be what it might, and to effect the arrest of the entire skin-game gang; but just how this could be done he at first could not imagine.

He knew that Foley, once they had left the farm and arrived at the tannery, would not suffer him to escape, and that his situation would immediately become desperate on being exposed to the remainder

of the gang, and placed helplessly in their power.

After he had finished his breakfast, however, he hit upon the plan by which the desired object might be attained.

This was brought to his mind by seeing, in one of the corridors of the house the Jenks boy, with whom he had had a talk the previous afternoon.

"If I can work in that kid to help me, I may yet pull through der hole and pinch der whole gang," he decided, at once excited by the idea.

Hurriedly joining the lad, he led him into the room in which he had slept the previous two nights.

"Say, kid, der boss is going ter take yer father away from here to-day, did you know it?" he asked.

"No, I didn't know it," replied the Jenks boy, with a quick interest.

"Well, he is, just der same."

"Where are they going to take him?"

"That's what I don't know, and what I want to find out," rejoined Steve. "If you'll do what I say, kid, I'll see to it your father don't come to no bad end, but gets a decent burial anywhere you say."

The proposition struck the Jenks boy very favorably.

"I'll do anything you want me to, if you can promise me that," he immediately cried, with great eagerness. For he already had decided Steve to be away over the average, seeing him about so much with one of the head men of the institution.

"Are you sure you can do just what I tell you?" demanded Steve.

"I'm certain I can."

"There'll be der devil ter pay if you don't."

"But I will do it; don't you fear about that."

"Can yer read and write?"

"Of course I can! I've been to school."

"That's der stuff!"

With which trite expression of approval,

Steve drew out the notebook and pencil he always carried with him, and gave his companion a clap on the shoulder.

"We'll do der job yet!" he exclaimed. "And if we pull off the trick without a mishap, I'll see to it you gets what you want."

Using the bureau for a desk, Steve then wrote the following message to Chief O'Mara and signed his name to it:

"Chief Roger O'Mara, Police Headquarters, Pittsburg: The leather trust meets at —— tannery this Monday afternoon. The entire gang can be pulled. Hurry four men out here and make a raid. They have discovered who I am and mean to do me up." STEVE MANLEY."

Having carefully prepared this message, Steve again turned to the waiting boy.

"Now, Jenksey," he said, very earnestly; "yer must get wise ter what I'm going ter tell yer and be sure ter do just what I say."

"I'll do it, never fear."

"First yer must hide outside here somewhere, in a place where no one can get onto you, and watch der stable. D'ye see?"

"Yes; I'll do that."

"Twon't be long before you'll see Foley and me drive off with der wagon, an' yer father's body'll be in it."

"What am I to do then?"

"Then you must follow der team, no matter where it goes, an' no matter how far it goes."

"Will it be one of the farm wagons?"

"Sure it will! He couldn't take der body away in der sulky, could he?"

"If it's one of the heavy wagons, then I can easily follow it."

"But yer don't want ter let Foley see yer, make sure of that."

"That will be easy enough to do," nodded the Jenks boy. "I can follow the team, and keep out of sight of Foley."

"Good for you! And der rest is just as easy," Steve went on to explain.

"What is the rest?"

"Pretty soon der team will come ter der place where Foley is going. It's likely to be a tanyard in some town near here."

"Don't you know the town?"

"No; that's what I'm trying to get wise to. I want you to follow der team till you see me and Foley get out. You can tell a tanyard, when yer see it, can't yer?"

"I think I can, if it's where they make leather."

"That's what it is. An' then, kid, yer want ter move sharp, for like as not yer father's skin an' mine may depend on it."

"I'll not waste a second!" the lad cried. "What am I to do?"

"Yer must take this message, it's a telegram, and fly ter der nearest telegraph office."

"There'll be one at the railroad station."

"Sure there will! Now hold on a bit. Yer see I've left room here for yer to write in der name of der town, an' der name of der tannery. Are yer on to der scheme?"

"Oh, yes, I see!" exclaimed Jenks. "And the moment you and Foley leave the wagon I am to find out who runs the tannery and write the name in here. Then I am to rush to the telegraph office and put in the name of the town, and then send the message. Is that it?"

"Say, yer was cut out ter be on der force!" cried Steve, approvingly. "That's der very caper!"

"What do you mean by on the force?"

"On der detective force, of course."

"Are you a detective?"

"Sure I am."

The Jenks boy's eyes opened wider and Steve at once grew several inches in his plastic imagination.

"That does settle it," he rejoined, with much eagerness. "I'll do precisely what you have told me."

"An' don't let any grass grow under your feet, will yer?"

"Not a blade."

"Take der message, then, and look out you don't lose it."

"I'll not lose it."

"And here's some money ter pay for sending it, an' here's der pencil ter write in der name of der tannery, and der name of der town."

"Don't you fear but what I'll do the work all right," said Jenks, with a shake of his head, as he accepted the proffered articles.

"And you're sure you're wise to der whole business?"

"Perfectly sure!"

"Good enough, then! Now make a sneak out of der house, an' hide somewhere till you see me and Foley drive off with der body."

Tommy Jenks nodded and flew out of the house, and that was the last Steve saw of him for nearly two hours.

At precisely ten o'clock the farm wagon, with Foley and Steve on the seat, left the stable yard and turned into the country road.

At the end of a half mile they entered a strip of woods.

Steve then turned about a little on the seat and pretended to make sure that the covering of loose straw was all right, which had been placed over the box containing the body of the dead man.

At the same time he glanced back over the road by which they had come, and he immediately felt a thrill of satisfaction and relief.

A hundred yards behind, and stealing cautiously after the slowly moving wagon, was the Jenks boy.

The moment Steve turned, however, the lad dove into the shrubbery at one side of the road.

"Der kid is all right!" said Steve to himself. "He's der real thing! And I'll gamble der chief gets der message."

CHAPTER IX.

CORNERING THE LEATHER TRUST.

At precisely noon the team approached the outskirts of a neighboring town, on the very edge of which the inferior buildings and discolored surroundings of the tannery run by the firm of Pike & Burke were located.

Over the gate to the yard, which gave ingress through a high wooden fence, was a sign bearing the firm's name, and Steve thought of the Jenks boy and the telegram.

He also recognized the character of the place the moment they approached.

"We are going to stop here for a time, youngster," Foley said, grimly, as they neared the gate to the yard.

"Is this where der friends of der quiet passenger in behind hangs out?" inquired Steve, innocently.

"Yes," growled Foley.

"Well, they don't live in a very swell joint."

"Nevertheless, we are going to leave the body here."

"He won't make any kick at that, even. Der place looks like a tannery."

"And a tannery is what it is," said Foley, upon whose bearded face an expression of sullen determination had steadily been settling.

He drove into the yard, and there was met by two men, both tough-looking fellows in middle life, whose soiled hands and clothes indicated their vocation.

"What has brought you out here, Foley?" demanded one of them, in surprise.

"You'll know soon enough," growled Foley, springing down from the wagon and leading them aside.

They talked for several minutes in subdued tones, with occasional glances in the direction of the young detective; and Steve took the chance to look back towards the road.

An eighth of a mile away, running at the top of his speed, was the Jenks boy.

"Sure thing der kid's all right!" Steve again decided.

Then the voice of Foley fell harshly on his ears.

"Come down here, boy!" he called. "We're going to carry in the body."

"Couldn't yer get it in without me coming down?" demanded Steve, nevertheless obeying the command and joining the three men on the ground.

"Yes, we could, but we didn't want to," retorted Foley, fixing a firm grip upon Steve's shoulder. "You come this way and I'll show you where you're to wait."

"I can wait out here. D'ye think I'm afraid of catching cold?" cried Steve, hoping to get a chance to cut and run.

But Foley suspected no less than this, and was not giving him the opportunity.

"You'll wait where I'll say," he rejoined, bluntly. "The office ought to be good enough for you."

With this he opened the door of a small office in one corner of the rough wooden building, and led Steve into it and closed the door.

"Say, what's all this fur, anyway?" Steve now resentfully demanded, when the two tanners also strode into the place. "D'ye think I'm going ter steal yer blooming crib?"

"Sit down in that chair!" commanded Foley, with a sudden outburst of passion. "You'll soon find out what it's all about."

"Well, I ain't deaf," retorted Steve, glaring up at him. "Did yer think I was away off on a hill somewhere? I can hear what

yer say if yer don't holler. What have I done that youse have all got yer lamps turned on me like that?"

"We're looking at you because you're a dirty little spy!" cried Foley, with a threatening shake of his fist in Steve's face. "You've lied to me from the start, and you're at work for the Pittsburg police."

"Oh, you go chase yerself!" cried Steve. "You've been hitting der pipe again. Somebody's been tellin' yer a fish story. Where'd yer get that idea?"

"From this thing on your vest!" shouted Foley, forcibly jerking Steve to his feet and turning back his coat to show the badge. "That's where I got the idea, you little whelp!"

"Oh, you lemme be! That don't cut any ice. I found that in der street only last week."

"Don't put up that yarn to me."

"'Tain't a yarn. It's der dead truth. What do yer s'pose I am, a policeman? I haven't got such a graft as that; I wish I had."

"Tie the little devil up until Gray comes," now cried one of the tanners, "and we'll decide what to do with him."

"There is but one thing to do," retorted Foley, angrily. "He must be put out of the way or he'll blow the whole business."

"That may be so, if you are sure he knows about it."

"Mebbe he's telling the truth!" cried the other tanner, doubtfully.

"Sure I'm telling the truth!" exclaimed Steve. "If yer was wise at all yer could see it in my face. You guys must be working some awful cheesy plant for yer ter be so warm over it."

"We'll make sure that you stay where we put you, just the same!" cried Foley, with an angry frown. "Get me a rope, one of you."

"There is one right here."

"Say, you ain't going ter tie me!" yelled Steve. "I won't stand for it!"

"You'll stand for worse before we're through with you," answered Foley, seizing him roughly by the collar and throwing him to the floor.

And, despite kicks and yells, Steve quickly was bound hand and foot and seated in the chair.

"Now, tell me the truth!" cried Foley. "If you don't, it will be all your life is worth."

"I've told yer der truth," persisted Steve, glaring defiantly at the ruffian's flushed and angry face.

"No, you haven't! You——"

"Let him stay here till Gray comes,"

Pike again interrupted. "He's the head of this business, and he'll kick like a steer if you do anything without first consulting him."

"Besides," put in Burke, "that body must be got under cover."

This settled the matter for a time, and Steve was rudely dragged from the office and cast into a room at one side, where he was left helplessly secured upon a pile of loose hides until the ruffians had decided what remedy the situation required.

Nearly two hours passed before Steve saw anything more of them.

Once he heard them lugging and tugging outside, and then the sound of a truck's wheels over the uneven floor, and he knew the body of the man had been brought into the building and probably stowed away out of sight.

Once, too, he heard Foley furiously growling because Dr. Gray was so late in coming, and cursing the delay which his absence imposed on him.

But Steve was glad enough of this, for he knew it would give Chief O'Mara time in which to respond to the telegram, and to reach the town by train.

It was near the middle of the afternoon before the situation culminated.

Then the closed door of the room in which Steve was lying was forcibly opened, and the five men comprising the gang strode into the room.

Patten, the peddler, was, of course, still under arrest in the city.

The moment they entered the room Steve knew that Foley had told them the whole story, for the face of the Pittsburg physician was ghastly pale, and even Meckleburg, the Jew, was trembling violently and in great excitement.

"Is this the boy!" cried Gray, the moment his eyes fell upon Steve.

"Of course it's the boy!" Foley sullenly growled. "Why else would we have him tied here?"

"Take off his badge and let me see it."

"Say, you guys'll get it for this!" cried Steve, resentfully, while Foley bent over him to remove the badge. "I'll give der whole business away after being used like this."

"What whole business?" cried Gray, sharply.

"About der body being brought here from der poor farm," answered Steve. "What business d'ye suppose?"

"Is that all the business you know about?" Gray sternly demanded.

"Ain't that enough?"

"Answer my question!"

"Gimme time ter think!" retorted Steve,

still courageous and defiant. "What yer trying ter do, scare a kid ter death?"

"Let me see the badge!" cried Gray.

He stood for some moments closely studying it, and all the while the paleness of his face increased and the truth became more and more apparent to him.

The several men stood by, watching him intently, and finally Meckleburg asked, tremulously:

"Vat do you make of it, dogdor?"

"The worst for us that can be made," answered Gray, curtly.

"Oh, mine gracious, dogdor, you don't mean it!" groaned the Jew. "It would be terrible if der truth should be known. Think what a peezness vould be ruined, and how der trade in der chooze vould fall off when der vimen learn—"

But here he was interrupted by an angry oath from Gray.

"You infernal Jew!" he cried, "aren't you telling the boy the very facts you hope he has not discovered? But I'll force the truth from him."

"What are you going to do?" cried Burke.

"Bring him out here!" commanded Gray, with an ugly determination in his frowning eyes. "Bring him out here and douse him into one of the vats. I'll drown him, but what'll I have the truth out of him."

"Say, youse fellers—"

"Silence him and bring him along!" shouted Gray, angrily.

Steve gave utterance to a yell, when Foley stooped down and caught him up bodily.

Then the ruffian clapped his hand over Steve's mouth.

"Bring him along!" repeated Gray.

With Steve in his arms, the burly ruffian from the poor farm strode out of the room, and followed Dr. Gray across the shop to a great vat of dark-colored liquid in a tank on the level of the floor.

"Take him by the collar!" Gray commanded, sternly. "Take him by the collar and duck him into this once or twice. We will see if a taste of that will open his mouth."

The light was better out there than in the room from which Steve had been brought, and the moment Foley stood the boy upon his feet a sudden cry of dismay broke from the lips of the approaching Jew.

"Oh, mine gracious, dogdor!" he cried, with an irrepressible groan. "Look at him! Look at him!"

"What do you mean, you dog?"

"Der boy's face! I mean der boy's face!" shouted the Jew, pointing in great excitement at Steve's white countenance. "It's der same boy as vos putting der polish on

your chooze at der ball, ven I vos asking about der bundles of rags. It's der same; it's der very same!"

Dr. Gray sprang back as the truth was thus brought home to him.

"By Heaven! you are right!" he cried, with his thin gray lips twitching violently. "And I'm just too late in getting out of the infernal business."

"Out of der peezness, dogdor?"

"Yes, out of the business! It was for that I came here to-day. Now, an exposure by this boy will be sure to ruin me. If he has not already disclosed the facts, he must be put out of the way before he can do it. The game he has been playing upon us——"

"Has been a very complete success, Dr. Richard Gray!"

The interruption sounded in loud and unexpected tones from the direction of the tannery door, and a yell of joyous triumph broke from young Steve Manley's lips.

For the ringing voice was that of Chief O'Mara, and the heavy tread of approaching men was sounding across the tannery floor.

Closely followed by three of his inspectors, and by the diminutive figure of Tommy Jenks, the chief was rapidly entering the tannery, and striding toward the dismayed gang of skin-game workers at the rear of the shop.

The Jew threw up his hands and gave utterance to a groan of despair; but the head of Dr. Gray, from whose cheeks the last vestige of color had vanished, was bowed without a word upon his breast.

"Loose this boy, Garrity, and the rest of you secure these men!" commanded Chief O'Mara, whipping out a pair of handcuffs from his own pocket. "Here you are, Morrisey! Make every man of them a prisoner."

"Then you got der message, chief?" cried Steve, eagerly, even before the lines were fairly removed from his arms.

There was a suspicious moisture in Chief O'Mara's eyes when he took Steve Manley by the hand.

"Yes, I got the message, Steve, and you have done a great job," he rejoined, quite huskily. "But you should not have taken such chances!"

"Oh, those guys couldn't turn down a good man, chief!" cried Steve, with a joyous laugh. "Sure, sir, I knew you'd be here in time to take der last trick!"

And so he had been, indeed, but it was by a very narrow margin.

Before dark that night the entire gang of skin-game workers were safely lodged in the Pittsburg jail, and the infamous business ended in that locality for many and many a day.

The trial of the men was made memorable the country over, both because of the heinous character of the work in which they had been engaged and the exceeding novelty of it, and the entire gang were ultimately given a long and well-deserved sentence in the State's prison.

And not only was the case itself made famous, but also the name of the young officer by whose clever work the gang had been so speedily run down and convicted. Upon the front page of nearly half the daily papers in the land there might have been seen at that time the smiling face of young Steve Manley.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 20) will contain, "The Head Hunter; or, Steve Manley's Secret Mission," which will relate a mysterious case on the Pittsburg water front.

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- 18—Called Down; or, Steve Manley in a Desperate Strait.
- 17—Found Guilty; or, Steve Manley Against Court and Jury.
- 16—A Paper Gold Mine; or, Sheridan Keene After Money Order Book 2409.
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- 14—The Mysterious Signal; or, Sheridan Keene on the Water Front.
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